

DEATH AND BURIAL

When a person is dying, all the kin within reach gather round him; otherwise the agony would be much prolonged. Hippolyto's wife fought death for two hours until the arrival of Nino, her husband's paternal uncle, who sent for her husband. Already unconscious, she expired as soon as Hippolyto arrived at her side. Paternal male relatives, primarily brothers and uncles, dig the grave, but other kin also help. They clip the hair, if it has grown excessively during illness, placing the surplus hair next to the body. Nino told me that, on the occasion of his father's death, his mother had the shaman Romão called in, who took down the invisible hammock of the deceased's soul (naçii'), rolled it up, and placed it beside the body. At the dead person's side of the house are placed a bit of food and a little drink that he liked when he was alive. All the Tukuna whom I consulted agreed that in ancient times the body was buried, with knees flexed, in an urn; it was decorated with armbands, tooth necklaces, and glass beads. The deceased never had his weapons with him in the grave, lest his naçii' use them against living persons. A pot was placed upside down over the mouth of the urn. Thus it was carried to the cemetery (ta'uke) and buried, not very deeply. Over the grave, which was sometimes marked with a stake of muirapiranga wood, the food was placed which previously had been put at the side of the corpse when it was in the house, or a little maize, water, and fire; otherwise, the naçii' would come at night and disturb the provisions kept in the house. Highly regarded persons, especially children, were buried inside the house, which was not burned down.

There are no reports of secondary burial. Weeping of relatives for the deceased was, and is, moderate, and there are no attempts at suicide, mutilations, or injuries motivated by mourning. Upon returning from the burial, all bathe, rubbing themselves with calabash tree (*Crescentia cujete*) leaves to free themselves of the smell of the corpse. The house is swept, but not the path to the cemetery. On that, however, they scatter the leaves of a plant called dęte, which serve as flails, arraias (lit., rays, skates) for the naçii', impeding their return.

On the left bank of the Igarapé da Rita, a little above Hippolyto's place, an ancient cemetery was discovered, containing many burial pots with bones and beads, covered with flat receptacles. Bates also refers to Tukuna urn burial: "The dead bodies of their chiefs are interred, the knees doubled up, in large jars under the floor of their huts." Tessmann describes a form of burial so different that his informant must have referred to funeral customs of some other tribe with which he was acquainted:

Alle Leute, Häuptlinge, gewöhnliche Leute und Kinder werden gleichartig bestattet und zwar in einem Kanu das mit Holzplatten zugedeckt wird. Dieser Sarg wird nicht in den Häusern begraben sondern ausserhalb, in der Pflanzung. ... Bei Zaubernern wird die Leiche nicht wieder ausgegraben, wohl aber bei Lichtmenschen. Es geschieht nach etwa vier Monaten. Die Schädel und alle Knochen werden herausgenommen, sauber gereinigt, in Körbe getan und an einer besonderen Stelle, die Tauke genannt wird, von neuem bestattet. Es soll ein kleiner Hügel über dieser Stelle aufgeschüttet werden.

Canoe burial was practiced by the Omágua, of whom Heriarte wrote in 1662: "When they die they are buried, taken to the river with great ceremony and with

Nimuendajú: *The Tukuna*

101

756 the spirits' arrows. Also, the spirits of dead trees may be present anywhere in the
 776 neighborhood and wound those with whom they collide. A person with an over-
 824 heated body feels the arrow wound from a spirit as a fillip with the fingertips.
 [763] This is the supposed cause of some deaths, due ultimately to the malefactions of
 some shaman. The most dangerous tree of all is the *caspi cipó* (*Banisteria* sp.),
 which the Tukuna know only by its Peruvian name of *ayahuasca*, sometimes cor-
 rupted into *čučuva'ča*. It is strange that they are unaware of the plant's qualities;
 because of this ignorance they do not prepare from it any narcotic, as do the neigh-
 boring Indians. Thus, they know that the Kokáma possess a plant which produces
 [276] visions; but only one Tukuna, now deceased, learned from them its use as a nar-
 cotie, and he did not pass the knowledge along to anyone else.

According to my informants, the chief Domingos ču'nek], a curing shaman (p.
 [187] 65) had a different method of stimulating visions. There is a cultivated tree with
 small, white, calycine flowers which, when broken open, exhibit a liquid. Placing
 drops of this in his eyes, ču'nek] succeeded in seeing the demon dyē'vaš (see p.
 120), as well as other demons (ñoo'), and the tree spirits; he could also discover
 his enemies. Other trees possessing spirits are the kapok, *sumakuma*, whose spirit
 is identified with the forest demon Caapora of the lingua geral, the *manixy* (?),
 the *açacá* (*Hura crepitans*), the *muirapiranga*, the *ucuhuba* (*Virola* sp.), and a
 tree which reaches at the most a diameter of fifteen centimeters and is called in
 Tukuna na'i-ya-dyó'], that is, "shaman log." Its wood has an odor similar to that
 of laurel, and the soil around its trunk is always barren.

756 *Instruction of a shaman.*—Any person who wishes to become a shaman must be
 placed in contact with the spirits of the trees by another person already initiated.
 Some shamans begin to educate their sons when the boys are six years old. Usually,
 however, the aspirant betakes himself to a master of recognized fame, whom he
 pays for instruction. This teacher begins only after sunset. Within only two months'
 time the disciple (nyēna'r]kat]) possesses the most necessary knowledge for curing
 through suction and by the application of herbs or other medicinal substances.

756 During this period of instruction he must abstain from sexual intercourse and
 262 must follow a diet, eating only certain fishes (eachorra, trahira, sardinha, curimatá,
 caraiacó vermelho, and jejú, but no scaleless fish) and green bananas, taking care
 that these last are straight and not curved as they usually are. Among birds espe-
 cially recommended to him are *macucáua* (*Tinamus* sp.) and *tangurupará* (*Monassa*
 sp.). All of his food must contain very little salt; he should completely abstain
 from pepper, fats, sweets, and alcoholic beverages and should also avoid exposure
 to the sun.

756 Initiation is in two parts: in the first, the master presents to the disciple a portion
 of the magical substances in his body; in the second, he places him in contact with
 the spirits of the trees. The disciple is specially prepared for the initiation; he must
 drink a gourdful of tobacco infusion so as to vomit all impurities (*puya*) acquired
 [276] through sexual contact; after which he must wash out his mouth. The infusion
 leaves him in a state of narcosis. The master, by massaging his own body, directs
 toward his mouth all the magical substances which he possesses, vomiting them in
 the form of slime (ta:'kaka; i.g., *tacacá*, a beverage of manioc starch). Holding
 the slime in the palm of his hand, he shows this to the disciple, inviting him to